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Birkholz: Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee will work to Outlaw Aquatic Nuisance Species

LANSING- Senator Patricia Birkholz, R-Saugatuck Township, today announced that, as the Chair of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee, she will actively support bills to rid aquatic nuisance species from our Great Lakes, and other waterways in Michigan.

Birkholz, along with Senators Beverly Hammerstrom, R-Temperance, and Alan Sanborn, R-Richmond, have introduced a package of bills to prohibit the importation of any genetically engineered organism (GEO) without the permission of the director of the Department of Agriculture. A GEO is produced when an organism is modified with the genetic material of another organism. Under this legislation, the Department of Natural Resources may also restrict or prohibit the importation of any GEO.

In addition to regulating GEO's, legislation has also been introduced to make it a crime to possess or release certain aquatic nuisance species. Species forbidden to be released include the Chinese Snakehead, the Asian and Grass Carp, and the Rudd. If the legislation passes, an individual who violates this measure will be fined or imprisoned, and will also be ordered to reimburse the state for damages to the natural resources as a result of introducing a nonnative species into our environment.

"As the chair of the Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee, I feel it is necessary to review the proposed legislation to help protect our waters from the invasion of these aquatic nuisance species, and preserve Michigan's ecosystem," Birkholz stated. "I think it is important to involve the directors of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Natural Resources in monitoring the importation of genetically altered species, before this issue becomes an even larger problem for our state."